

**ARTICLE**

# **4 principles to remember when talking to your children about coronavirus**

**BY BRAD HAMBRICK**

March 24, 2020

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Add the coronavirus pandemic to the list of topics—like [sexuality](http://bradhambrick.com/parent-equip-talking-to-our-children-about-purity/) (<http://bradhambrick.com/parent-equip-talking-to-our-children-about-purity/>) and [transgender bathrooms](http://bradhambrick.com/talking-to-my-boys-after-the-transgender-talk-at-their-public-school/) (<http://bradhambrick.com/talking-to-my-boys-after-the-transgender-talk-at-their-public-school/>)—that we feel ill-prepared to talk to our children about. As parents, we don't get to choose what subjects become forefront and relevant to our children's lives. We are called to faithfully walk with our children through those subject matters.

Before we get into the details of the subject matter, let's talk about four general wisdom principles for having difficult conversations with your children.

**First, make sure you have a conversation, not a monologue.** The “win” is the second conversation your child initiates. The best outcome from any difficult conversation we initiate with our child is that our child feels more comfortable having awkward conversations with us. Remembering this helps us stay out of professor-mode. You want to know what your child thinks as much as you want to tell them what you think (or at least you should).

**Second, answer the questions your child is asking, not what's important to you as an adult.** The “win” is your child navigating their world better, not creating a rubric for evaluating political decisions. This might be as simple as asking your child, “You've probably seen the stories on TV about that new virus. What do you think about that?” You can also ask yourself, “When I was my child's age, what would I want to know about the coronavirus?” Also, with this in mind, use language and examples that fit your child's world and cognitive-social development.

**Third, if you have multiple children, keep the grapevine game in mind.** What you tell the oldest will get “translated” to the youngest. We all know we want what we share to be age appropriate, but that gets complicated in a home with multiple children. Unless there is a strong reason to do otherwise, talk to your children together.

**Fourth, remember your body language and tone will communicate more than your words.** Your nonverbal communication will influence your child's emotions more than your words. Be relaxed and conversational. Imagine how

you would tell them that a family member died, and then, don't do that.

Children use the sense of alarm in their parents to gauge their own sense of alarm.

These principles should help us form the conversation with our children by asking, "What do my children want to know?" Chances are that it's things like:

- Am I safe? Is our family safe?
- Why is this a big deal? How scared should I be?
- How long will this last? When will I get to go back to school?
- Why is this getting so much attention and causing everything to shut down?

Helping our children put their questions and emotions into words is part of our role as parents. It is part of helping them mature. Again, the interaction during the conversation is as valuable as any of the content that we impart to them.

I will try to develop some sample dialogue for each of the questions above.

*Am I safe? Is our family safe?* "Yes, we are safe. Even if you get sick, the virus is a lot like having the flu for young, healthy children like you. That's not fun, so we want to make wise choices like washing our hands and limiting how much we're around people who may be sick. For older people, the virus can be more serious. That's why schools and other organizations are being cautious. They want to prevent us from spreading it to the most vulnerable people."

*Why is this a big deal? How scared should I be?* "It's a big deal because it's new. It always takes a little while to learn how to treat a new disease. Doctors are still learning the best ways to treat people who get this one. While most people who

get the virus get better on their own, doctors want to make sure they know how to care for the people who need help to getting better. We don't need to be scared, but we do want to be wise. The things we've talked about—like washing our hands and avoiding places where people may be sick—should keep us safe as doctors learn how to treat the virus.”

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  (<http://twitter.com/home/?status=twitterfy via @erlc>)

*How long will this last? When will I get to go back to school?* “I don't know. Does it make you feel better to know there are questions that mommy/daddy don't know the answer to either [smile]? Having to say ‘I don't know’ doesn't go away just because you get older. Schools will make the decision they think is best. Big groups like schools, usually play it safe. So, you don't have to worry about them opening back up too soon.”

*Why is this getting so much attention and causing everything to shut down?* “This is a way to love people who aren't as young and healthy as you are. Jesus tells us that we need to care for people who are vulnerable. By doing what we can to slow down the spread of the virus—like closing school—we help the doctors learn how to treat the virus. The people on TV are just trying to make sure the doctors have the time they need and get as many people to cooperate as possible. After all, how many times does your teacher at school have to say something for the class to follow along . . . and there are only 20 of you [smile].”

After the conversation ends, pray for people making decisions. Pray in the same way you had the conversation above, in words appropriate for your child's age and toward your child's concerns. This is a time when you are teaching your child what it's like to pray about the things that concern them as a five-, seven-, or 12-year-old.

You might pray something like this, "God, thank you for making our bodies and knowing how they work. Thank you for loving us when we're healthy and when we're sick. Because you love the people who are sick, we ask that you help the doctors learn how to treat the coronavirus. Lord, help us to enjoy this extra time at home and love one another well even if we get a little bored."

*This article originally appeared [here \(http://bradhambrick.com/coronavirus2/\)](http://bradhambrick.com/coronavirus2/).*

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